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# A Meditative Art

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**A Meditative Art**

**By:**

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BA in Liberal Arts, Purdue University, 2006

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Art,

With a Major in Painting and Drawing

Governors State University

University Park, IL 60466

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## Introduction: The Process of Evolution

I began to develop an appreciation for abstract art midway through my experience at Purdue University. Along with admiring non-representational art, I also studied graphic design. My love for abstraction and graphic design began to show within my artwork. When using design elements, the simplicity and thought about every placement on my work was striking and influential to whom I was becoming as an artist.

Abstract is a style in art that requires time and a process of thought that makes your mind see the world in a different light. I had moments where I had a difficult time accepting and ultimately understanding abstraction, especially the works of minimal painters. After some time and critical thinking, I began to realize that I shouldn't just look at the work but I needed to look outside of the box. I began to ask myself a lot of questions. "What do the colors express in this piece?" and "With minimal images and information, can a painting express and communicate emotion?" With these questions in mind, I started to slowly appreciate and use abstraction in my work.

As I developed as a student at Purdue University, design was becoming such a major part of who I was as an artist. Combining abstraction and design elements created artwork that seemed to fit who I was, not only as an artist, but as a person. My creative mind was developing and exploring the ideas of organic forms that were shown in simple and abstract drawings. All my lines needed to have meaning and each color had to have purpose. With design in my background, I had to have a reason why I chose to use all the images, colors, and

lines in my artwork. Through a variety of unsatisfying and undeveloped drawings and paintings, I was beginning to slowly gain my artistic style, however my confidence was lacking.

I started to develop my style of abstraction and graphic design elements using pastel chalk. This was a media that gave me the smooth blends and color combinations that I was exploring. My artwork was never any larger than 18x24 inches. A lot of my drawings were based off of assignments that were given to me during undergrad, which seemed to limit me researching and developing my true thoughts and feelings that I wanted to express and show as an artist. My artwork didn't take on a specific theme behind each piece however; I had an obvious style that still needed to be perfected.

I began to become a perfectionist with how I used every material. I wanted all my colors to reflect a perfect blend and curve of each line. This is still something that I find myself struggling with today. The designer in me cannot have any imperfection of a line. Through my eyes, the slightest bump or wrong placement of a line could throw a whole drawing or painting off. The viewer's eye always needs to be at ease as it works around and through each of my pieces. I don't want any distractions throughout my work; just focus. At this point in my life, I didn't know the underlying meaning of each piece, but I knew that each artwork had to look simple, effortless, and clean.

I worked on my artwork in this manner throughout my days at Purdue University. The years that followed my graduation from Purdue, I began to become inspired by the world around me. The stress of everyday "real-world"

life seemed exhausting. I looked at the environment around me and took it all in. I started viewing one aspect that inspired me the most: nature. I wanted to create paintings that would calm my life down. Nature was that calmness for me. My work was being shown at local spaces but I still had no real dialog with it. With this sudden admiration of nature and my continued development of an abstract and graphic design style, I was ready for the next step in my art career. I began the pursuit of my master's degree at Governors State University with some lack of understanding the true meaning and theme behind my artwork. I always paid more attention on my style in each piece and would later learn that I needed meaning and a story for my art. I have now come to realize that each painting has significance behind it and is not just a drawing or image in canvas.

## A Visual Meditation: Graduate Work and Development

I have always enjoyed nature and the world that lives and breathes around us. However, it was not until my years that followed my graduation from Purdue University that I really started to observe all aspects of nature. There are shadows and values of color that form in each area of nature daily that most people just pass by. Nature was now becoming a hidden meditation for me. The curves, folds, lines, and harmonies created in the environment were breathtaking. When I began to paint the images that were inspiring me from my natural surroundings, my whole body felt at ease. I was in my world of peace. All my thoughts of the day were released and I was able to let go of all the chaos in my head.

My artwork symbolizes the idea of meditation through the true and organic forms. I paint a space where my mind is at ease. A place where all the chaos of the world around me stops and becomes beauty. In my artwork, the organic forms that I produce reflect the meditative power of natural forms. My mind sees the environment in a simple abstract appearance that mirrors a sense of peace and harmony. By painting with smooth, organic, and soft lines my artwork helps me get to a point of relaxation. Through the process of letting go of the world that surrounds me, I am at ease as I create. My hope is that each painting inspires a person to visually ponder and become lost within his or her thoughts.

I have always been attracted to the surroundings of nature. However, my eyes never observed what is truly there; they observed more of what I felt. I don't see the details of the natural world. Instead, I see the obscurity behind the surface; a place where water becomes just a subtle sensation, and plants are given the

impression of development and possibility. I prefer to paint the parts of nature that speak to my mind, body and soul: the areas that emphasize the organic form.

Using oil paint provides the opportunity to accomplish the soft unity of color that I need to complete each piece. I require a media that will let me work for hours at time on one area within a painting. My work starts with charcoal sketches that I create when I feel inspired and at ease with the environment around me. The details of the object slowly disappear and simplify into a form that reflects my mind at a meditative state. The elegant and graceful lines are pleasing to my eyes, which brings a sense of calmness. My paintings are created to bring a person to a quiet place due to the limited color palette. I use a lot of blue, brown, and green tones, which are proven to naturally relax a person. The end result exhibits abstracted paintings that speak to me internally and give off a reflection of my soul at ease.

Artist such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove have both been inspiring artists for me through the creation of my painting series. Thematically and stylistically, I have found close relations to both artists because of their drive to show abstract images from nature. The true environment isn't shown, however, the vibrations and spirit of their surroundings are the motivation behind each piece. Georgia O'Keeffe is said to, "capture the raw brilliance of nature that only she could see and exposed us to its beauty." (Georgia). When I create my paintings I aim for creating depictions of places in nature that I see the upmost beauty in. I look and take in the form and energy of my surroundings instead of just passing them by. Arthur Dove follows the same concept by stating, "I not



only began to think subjectively but also remember certain sensations purely through their form and color, that is, by certain shapes, planes of light, or character lines determined by the meeting of such planes” (Hughes). In my own personal artwork as well as both O’Keeffe and Dove, art is seen as natural energy on canvas. It’s not about what you see in nature, but instead, about the soul and core of your surroundings.

There are three main themes that are a constant within each of my paintings in order to achieve the feeling of meditation through art; abstract organic forms, harmonious and soothing color palettes, and composition. Below, I will talk about each of the three themes and describe how I remained consistent throughout my series by discussing select paintings and drawings.

“Free” (image 1) and “Defeat” (image 11) are both 30x40 in size and were painted using oil paint in 2010. Free is the main focus piece of my series because it introduces a state of letting go by creating an abstract image of a bird in flight. Meditation is a time that your whole body release negative thoughts and internalizes your inner peace. “Defeat” is similar to “Free” in color and layout. The image is supposed to lead the viewer into feeling strong with a sense of overcoming an extreme moment. The flow of each organic line within my series allows a person to slowly relax. I pay special attention to creating perfect blend of color that allows the eye to loosen up and unwind. . Like O’Keeffe and Dove, I create and paint the spirit of the environment. My backgrounds always remain subdued in order for the organic form to dominate the composition. I feel that it’s also important to use harmonious color in order to steer clear of any chaos.

“Free” and “Defeat” both illustrate compositions that need to feel evenly balanced, flow off the space comfortably, and draws the eye around the paintings smoothly.

In late 2009, I painted this piece titled “Evolution” (image 2) using oils. It’s significant to use subdued color in my backgrounds because I want the viewer to concentrate on the main focus of each piece, which is the organic form. I never give too much information and detail of each form. I feel that this will only create disorder when my goal is to give off a sense of calm. As you look at each piece, the organic form that is placed in front of you is my emphasis. Each abstract form relates to an area of nature, but by no means is a specific part. Every painting and drawing in my series has multiple identities but I don’t single out one. This might look like a plant, however, as you continue to observe and your eye begins to relax you might feel the power of a sunset or the movement of a calm wind on a hot day.

“Pure” (image 3) painted in 2010 and “Wholesome” (image 16) painted in 2011, both define the idea of simply beauty in nature. In “Pure,” my artwork continues to use organic forms within the water but this particular painting focuses mainly on harmonious color. In this painting, I mostly used colors that are viewed as calming. Some paintings I limited my color palette, which pulls back on the energy in order to create a more tranquil state. Some paintings I use a larger range of color but make sure I use colors that blend smoothly and remain harmoniously with the eye. In “Wholesome,” I give the possibility of life within the sky and ground. The colors reflect innocence and clarity within the surface.

By creating this perfect blend of color, each piece creates a strong sense of harmony. In “Pure” and “Wholesome” I used a great deal of blue and cool tones. Blue is meant to naturally calm and relax a person. The abstract forms, blending of color, and composition is meant to make someone feel cool, weightless, and spiritual.

“Glide” (image 4) created in 2009, is another example of my conscious decision to use colors that are meant to calm the body when viewed. In this painting, I wanted the viewer to feel as if they were flowing through the space like wind. Within this painting, green represents tranquility. The mix of green and blue is a common color combination for me. Green is often used in decorating for its calming effect. For example, guests waiting to appear on television programs often wait in a “green room” to relax. Green is also thought to relieve stress and help heal. To me, these two colors put together reflect a sense of cool and calm. My intention was to abstract the feeling and form of wind gliding throughout the space of the canvas. Arthur Dove inspires me to accomplish simplicity at its finest. As artists, we both paint canvases that concentrate on the feelings of our surroundings instead of the actual appearance. My composition helps the eye flow and move smoothly in a consistent motion by simplifying.

“Peak” (image 5) created in 2010, is an organic form of strength. There is no better release than looking up into a beautiful blue sky and seeing something so powerful in front of you that no human can move. I was in Colorado when I was inspired by the most elegant skies and superior formations made on the horizon. Yet again, color plays an important role here and in my series. The

color choices I make have to allow the viewer to just completely let go within my paintings. Brown brings to mind feeling of warmth, comfort, and security. It is often described as natural, down-to-earth, and conventional, but brown can also be sophisticated. When brown mixes in with the blue tones, a serene composition comes to light. The natural form created within the brown allows the body to feel safe and secure.

“Spiral” (image 6) and “Release,” (image 7) both done in 2009 using oil paint, show the action of the bottled up anger and then final release of letting go. This was a personal meditation for me. I wanted to paint this meditation for others could experience the power of release. Composition was important. The lines needed to feel that they continued off the canvas. Again, color was consciously selected to aid in the harmony of each blend. In “Release,” the abstract organic form shown as a twist and release action. “Spiral,” displays the coil that life makes when continuous unwanted actions go in circles until you finally liberate and choose to live. The composition, blend of color, and abstract organic lines, allows each individual person to relate their life through my paintings without feeling required. Like O’Keeffe, painting smooth forms that flow effortlessly is a must. I give compositions that don’t have exact answers, but instead, can be seen with ease in many ways of life.

“Growth” (Image 10) is a strong example of combining abstract with graphic design elements. The lines on the upper left corner of the painting create a balance of color while stripping all detail on blending and imagery out. The organic form that develops within the piece blends the hues of green, brown, and

yellow. The form seems to thrive within the space leaving the viewer to feel the strength from the painting,

“Glow” (image 12) and “Arise” (image 13) both were painted with the meditation of hope and anticipation of what life might bring. Like O’Keeffe, it’s the spirit of the composition that comes alive. The composition in both is intended to read as the desire of looking forward to what time will bring and the light that is always ahead of you. Again, the near perfect color blends make it an easy and smooth transition to the eye as it moves within the paintings. Each organic line made within the surface able the viewer to connect and exist within each piece.

“Soar” (image 14) and “Live” (image 15) both are drawings that continue to show my reiteration of smooth blends and abstract organic forms. With incorporating pastel drawings, I am able to show my talents in other areas besides painting. The chalk pastel aids me in creating drawings that look similar to the finish of oil paints. The colors coincide together in such a striking way that it flows so effortlessly off the paper. The reactions of the forms speak to you in such a pure fashion. These two drawings continue to add to my serious a strong message of the observation of life and the meditative state that it can give you.

## Summary

I have completely enjoyed watching my visual mediation reveal itself during my experience of creating my graduate work. I have challenged and pushed myself as an artist in almost every possible way. Through this push, I created a collection that I am proud of. I had to increase the scale of my work. I have also introduced oil paint into my paintings. The importance of blending and richness of color could not have been accomplished without the use of oil paints.

As my compositions became more developed, I gained a better understanding and a greater relation to their nature. I became increasingly more aware of who I am as an artist and what I wish to explore and say within each piece. I have found that what began as a series about abstract forms created from simple sketches, has now evolved into my personal reflection on life. The series continues to grow, as does my dialog with the work and hopefully the viewer. I look forward to seeing how each piece that I create matures and grows.

I found that my experience of expressing my personal mediations onto canvas has been rewarding. Most importantly, I have gained confidence and skill throughout the development of my series. I have come to find that each significant experience in my life becomes a new visual inspiration. I have considered adding more drawings to my series as it continues to develop and progress. Regardless of the progression, I will always continue to work and be aware of my ability to visually inspire people.

### Work Cited

Hughes, Robert. Arthur Dove. . 10 April 2011

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Georgia O'Keeffe. 2011. 10 April 2011 <[the-artists.org](http://the-artists.org)>.